



OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL HEALTH EQUITY (OMHE)

Quarterly Newsletter

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK

OMHE has been busy this summer preparing for the new cohort of “Champions” (see page 11 for more information). We continue to offer technical assistance and support to all 8 state-operated facilities in addition to non-profit funded providers and even state agencies. The Multicultural Advisory Council (MCAC) is preparing for our annual retreat next month, where we will be reviewing our outcomes for the last two years of our three-year strategic plan and ensuring we finish strong in 2026!



OMHE has been conducting site visits in August and September with all of the 8 state-operated facilities to learn more about their facility strategic plans, Joint Commission Equity Standard implementation, specific needs, and strategies for collaboration. We are actively seeking and encouraging ways to promote the “Champions” at the facilities, including looking at the impact of their equity plan proposals after they complete the program. At OMHE, we are marketing the “Champions” on our annual Impact Statements, Quarterly Newsletters, and Member Directory, which can all be found on our webpage.

In this newsletter edition, you will find a lot of wonderful happenings across DMHAS. Many celebrations, successes, and recognitions. I encourage you to take some time to review the submissions and learn more about what each facility has been up to. I also encourage you to get involved at your facility and be a part of the MCC impact by joining your facility’s multicultural committee (MCC). Hispanic Heritage Month started on September 15th. Many of the MCC’s have been planning for events in observance of the month. You can reach out directly to the chair and/or co-chairs (many of whom are authors of these submissions) to learn about how you can get more involved.

Thank you for continuing to support our work and initiatives.

Happy all things fall!
- Dr. Samia Hussein 

MCAC MEMBERS

SULAIMAN AVERY(DAS)
LUIZA BARNAT (OOC)
JAMIE CHANDLER(SMHA)
RACHEL DUFFY (WFH)
ELLEN ECONS (OOC)
CLAUDE FIELDS (CRMHC)
ELIZABETH FLANAGAN
(YALE PRCH)
ROBERTA GOLDBERG
(SWCMHS)
SHARON GREAVES (OOC)
TARA HALL (OOC)
MUI MUI HIN-MCCORMICK
(PRIVATE PRACTICE)
SAMIA HUSSEIN (OOC)
CAROL KNIGHT (WFH)
ENRIQUE SIERRA(RVS)
LATANYA MANU(RVS)
CYNTHIA MARTIN (OOC)
STEPHANIE LAZARUS
(RELIANCE HEALTH, INC.)
KASHEENE LEVETT
(WCMHN)
BRITT LEWIS(CMHC)
ALINETTE MONTEIRO
(SWCMHS)
WILLIAM PIERCE (OOC)
STACY DEMARCO (CVH)
JYOTHI VAYALAKKARA
(CVH)
KYLE PEDERSEN(CMHC)
SHEMEKIA GARCIA
(RELIANCE HEALTH, INC)
TAMEKA ALLEN(RVS)



MICHELLE BEECKMAN FOR BEING A
PART OF MCAC AND
CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR NEW
POSITION AT DAS.



ENRIQUE SIERRA(RVS) TO
THE COUNCIL!

MCAC MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Jamie Chandler



Jamie is approaching two years as a trainer at SMHA and has been a member of the MCAC since that time. Her educational background includes an undergraduate degree from UCONN and a Masters in Organizational Management from Eastern CT State University.

Prior to joining DMHAS, she worked for over 20 years as a supervisor in distribution and manufacturing. I've always found fulfillment in helping others grow, both personally and professionally. In previous supervisory and training roles, she supported individuals along their unique journeys—mentoring, guiding, and encouraging them to reach their full potential. That passion for supporting others continues to drive her in her current role.

On joining the MCAC...

“At SMHA, I serve as the Chairperson of the Cultural & Spiritual Enhancement Committee and represent the facility on the MCAC. I was excited to join to collaborate with members throughout DMHAS on programs that make a real difference. As an active member of the Data Subcommittee, I am deeply involved in our segment of the strategic plan. Collaborating with members across the state, has been both rewarding and insightful, providing a broader perspective on community needs and priorities.”

When asked about culture and its connection to her profession, Jamie shared culture is dynamic and ever evolving. It takes many forms, and is shaped by our families, careers, communities, and lived experiences. While we each carry a unique set of cultural values, we are adaptable, constantly learning, growing, and changing. It's important to recognize that how we show up each day impacts not only our co-workers but the individuals we serve. Each of us plays a role in either enhancing or detracting from that experience.

What is something you know now that you wish you knew earlier in your professional career?

Taking time for self-care is not just important, it's vital. As we pour our energy into serving others, it's easy to forget our own needs and keep giving until there is nothing left. In doing so, we risk losing touch with the very essence of who we are. By prioritizing ourselves, we are able to show up as our best version.

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On inspiration...

“I feel that anyone around us can be a source of inspiration, we just need to take the time to recognize and appreciate each person's unique gifts. I'm especially inspired by those who take risks and work hard to achieve their goals. Everyone has their own challenges, but when we choose to be supportive and encouraging, we create a space where everyone has the opportunity to be successful in how they define success.”

Fun fact...

“I'm not a big fan of pasta. I know for some people, it's their go-to meal, but it's never really been mine. I rarely eat it, with the only exception being a summer pasta salad.”

Hobbies...

“I love to travel and really enjoy getting into the details of trip planning so I can make the most of every experience. This year, I've traveled to Exuma Bahamas, Punta Cana in the Dominican Republic, Maine, and Alaska.

Connecticut Mental Health Center

Celebrating New Leadership, New Art, and Mental Health Month by Britt Lewis, Interim Director of Clinical Services and Kyle Pedersen, Director of Organizational Health and CMHC Foundation

CMHC is excited to announce that Charles Dike, MD, MPH, will be the next CEO of CMHC effective October 1, 2025. Dr. Dike will also serve as deputy chair for state affairs for the Yale Department of Psychiatry. Dr. Dike is currently professor of psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine; medical director, Office of the Commissioner of DMHAS; immediate past president, American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL); and member, National Advisory Council of the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Previously he served as chief medical officer and superintendent of Whiting Forensic Hospital and interim co-director of the Yale Psychiatry Division of Law and Psychiatry.



“Charles is an inspiring clinical leader, a wonderful colleague and an effective chief medical officer for DMHAS. I look forward to working with him in his new capacity as CEO of CMHC,” said Nancy Navarretta, MA, LPC, commissioner of DMHAS in an announcement issued on July 28.

New art will soon grace the walls of the inpatient unit at CMHC. As described by Jessica Trzaska, CMHC Rehabilitation Therapist, Hands to Heart (2025, acrylic on canvas) was created by clients and staff on the CMHC 4th Floor Inpatient Unit to celebrate the diversity and unity of our community. Several participants who do not usually take part in artmaking joined in, making the project even more meaningful for everyone involved. Each hand represents a unique individual reaching toward a shared heart, symbolizing connection, hope, and healing.

During May, we recognized and celebrated Mental Health Month with activities and events to support mental health and well-being for clients and staff. Opportunities included: Client Appreciation Day, Game Day, Labyrinth Walk, Cookies & Coloring, Peer Support Panel, Mental Health Forum, Client Acupuncture Session, Coffee & Chat, Outpatient Rehabilitation Life Skills Presentation, Paint Party, Guided Mediation, and a delicious Ice-Cream Social with pick-your-own-toppings.

Erica Bailey, MSA, Behavioral Health Program Manager and Client Rights Officer led the planning team and said, “Mental Health Awareness Month was a fantastic opportunity to showcase awareness, offer support and boost morale of clients and staff. It was great to see so many people involved.”



Southwest Connecticut Mental Health System 2025 National RID Conference

by Roberta Goldberg, Staff Interpreter for the Deaf/DeafBlind/HoH

In early August, SWCMHS MCAC member, Roberta Goldberg, had the opportunity to attend the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) biennial national conference from July 31 through August 3rd, held in Minneapolis, MN. The conference offered a wealth of opportunities for continuing education for ASL/English interpreters. Many of the workshops were addressing power, privilege, and oppression, topics that we are required to learn about in order to maintain certification. The Minneapolis–Saint Paul metropolitan area is home to one of the largest and most tribally diverse urban Indigenous Nation populations, numbering well over 35,000. The largest Nations represented are Dakota and Ojibwe, and on the first day of the conference, we were introduced to some of their beliefs about four different animals: bear, eagle, owl, and wolf.

During the four days of the conference, we began each morning using the model of these animals and the energy and lessons that each represents. Bear gave us the strength to go forward and begin the journey of learning and pushing through challenges; owl encouraged us to face hard truths with courage; eagle asked us to reimagine systems and our collective future; and finally wolf invited us to walk the path together with commitment and strength. With so many diverse opinions and issues related to interpreting and the Deaf community we serve, RID conferences can be emotionally and psychologically challenging. Beginning each day with this framework helped to guide participants through some of the more difficult moments.



Office of the Commissioner

Did You Know? by Bill Pierce, DMHAS ADA Title II Coordinator

Thirty-five years ago on July 26, 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law. A year ago, I asked “what have we learned about the ADA?” Well, here are a few things I learned:

- The ADA considers a person to have a disability when they have: a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, or a record of such an impairment or the person is regarded as having such an impairment?
- Nearly 1 in 5 people in America have a disability (US Census Bureau).
- 26% of Connecticut residents have a disability with 15% of the people who have disabilities having a significant disability which limits their ability to work or live independently (New England ADA Center).
- More than 90% of disabilities are invisible (US Commerce Department).
- 40% of all people over the age of 65 have disabilities (Center for Disease Control) and 10,000 people turn 65 every day (AARP).
- “Disability is the only minority group that anyone can join at any time” (Yomi S. Young)

If you want to know more about the ADA, take the Workforce Development’s **Virtual LMS class** “*An Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*” **Course ID: DMHAS_ACREC208**. You can also find information about the ADA at the ADA National Network (www.adata.org) and other sources.

Southeastern Mental Health Authority

SMHA Memorial Garden Re-Dedication

by Jamie Chandler, Trainer, MS

On Wednesday, May 21, 2025, the SMHA Cultural and Spiritual Enhancement Committee proudly hosted the annual Memorial Garden Re-dedication event. Each year, we pause to honor and remember the colleagues and community partners who have dedicated their lives to community mental health care and recovery support who have passed away since 1995. Their unwavering commitment, compassion, and care have left a lasting impact on the clients they served and the colleagues they worked with.

As part of this meaningful tradition, new plants are dedicated annually to serve as living tributes that will continue to inspire and benefit future generations. The committee has hosted a plant sale and two bake sales that have helped to fund the new plantings for the garden and the committee members devote time to maintaining the garden. With every new bloom, we are reminded that renewal is always possible, and hope continues to flourish.

Clients and staff contributed to the garden's beauty and spirit by painting river rocks during our Mental Health Day event, and these vibrant, hand-painted stones add both color and significance to the space.

As we look ahead, the Memorial Garden stands as a bright and peaceful space where we can come together, reflect, and feel grateful – a living celebration of those who gave so much to others. We invite everyone who visits to pause, remember those who touched our lives, and feel inspired by the hope and growth that continue to bloom in their honor.



Image was taken after the new plantings were added to the garden after the ceremony.

Pictured from L to R

Shannon Scott, Jamie Chandler, Heather Talmadge and Elisette Feliciano

Whiting Forensic Hospital: What's Happening at Whiting?

by Rachel Duffy, PsyD

Psychotherapy Service Director; Clinical Psychologist

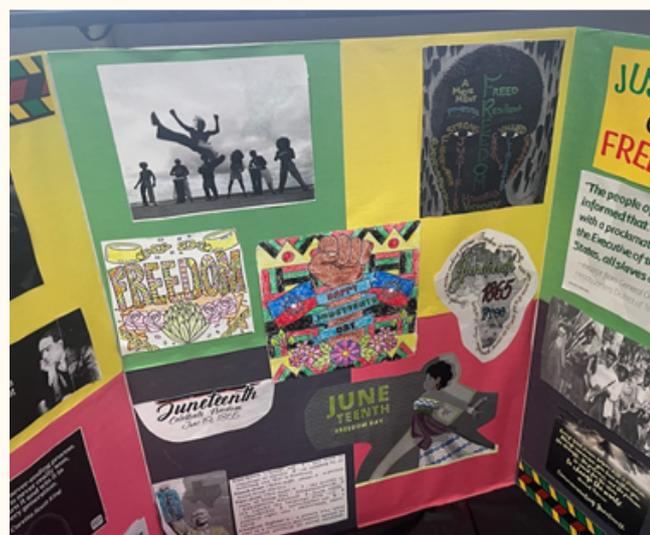
Whiting Forensic Hospital's IDREAM Team hosted their annual "Taste of Whiting" event on May 21st. Staff were encouraged to bring in food from their culture along with a brief description of the cultural significance of the dish. Attendees read quotes about food, community, and eating together before lining up to sample the dishes. The potluck was well attended, with 14 countries' cuisines represented.

Whiting teamed up with CVH and RVS staff to put on their Pride event on June 4th at the CVH Track. The track and surrounding area were adorned with rainbows and pride flags, making for a colorful backdrop to the day's events. Attendees visited the information tables with LGBTQIA+ resources, made a quilt square using the prompt, "What are you proud of?," ate rainbow sherbet, marched around the track, listened to speeches delivered by staff and clients, and danced to pride-themed anthems from the DJ booth.

Whiting celebrated Juneteenth throughout the month of June by involving the clients in themed bracelet-making, quizzes, and puzzles. On June 18th, staff and client celebrants gathered in Michaela's Garden to sing, "Lift Every Voice and Sing," read poetry from well-known writers as well as original poems written by Dutcher clients, and participate in a Juneteenth trivia game. A similar program was put on in the maximum-security building in the afternoon, with the addition of the announcement of the winners of the clients' Juneteenth poster making competition.



This poster was created by Ariana Llabani (Rehabilitation Therapy Assistant II) for Whiting Forensic Hospital's Taste of Whiting celebration.



This poster was created by Ariana Llabani (Rehabilitation Therapy Assistant II) for Whiting Forensic Hospital's Taste of Whiting celebration.

WCMHN Danbury

Celebrating New Staff and New Learning

by Jacqueline Taormina, Behavioral Health Clinical Director

Quarter 2 in Danbury started slowly but quickly gained momentum. We celebrated Administrative Professionals Day with an egg hunt, welcomed new staff—Alexis Browne and Elizabeth Parker to YAS, and Dr. Sally Romano as our new Psychiatrist—and honored our nursing team during Nurses Week. The month was filled with potlucks celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, Cinco de Mayo, and Memorial Day.

In June, we welcomed BHH Nurse Tara Green, hosted an engaging Intersectionality and Generational Trauma training by Cynthia Martin, and enjoyed an Art for Staff event with creations now displayed in the Lee Mac conference room. We wrapped up the month with summer treats, plus a Pride, Juneteenth, and Caribbean Heritage Month potluck.

A big thank-you to everyone who organized and participated in these events. We look forward to more celebrations in Quarter 3!



Kenneth Calbi

WCMHN Behavioral Health Home Manager International Recovery & Citizenship Collaborative Conference by Alexandra LaBarca

The Yale Program for Recovery and Community Health hosted this year's International Recovery and Citizenship Collaborative (IRCC) Conference. Western was invited to share the efforts made by the agency to invoke the spirit of recovery after participating in the Recovering Citizenship Learning Collaborative between 2020-2022. Since the learning collaborative, our agency has hired numerous recovery support specialists, two human service advocates, and revitalized Consumer Advisory Boards. Additionally, Western's tradition of the Recovery Conference has been brought back to life after COVID prevented gatherings. Attendees from around the globe learned about the recovery-based services our agency provides.



Alexandra LaBarca

Office of the Commissioner

What's Happening at OMHE?

by Cynthia Martin, OMHE Trainer

The Office of Multicultural Health Equity (OMHE) had a busy 2nd and now 3rd quarter. The Champions for Diversity and Health Equity Program – Cohort 2 concluded in June with all 30 participants graduating!! We have conducted 40 interviews for Champions Cohort 3 and have chosen this new group of 26 people who began on September 12th. The program runs from September to June with 15 full-day sessions covering in-depth education workshops from DEI topics, to leadership development, how to make a difference and much more.

Let's welcome our 26 participants into Cohort 3!

Calanthe Cavadini (DOT), Cherelle Jenkins (DDS), Dana Jacquemin (CMHC), Deval Raval (SMHA), Frederica Merzon (Friendship Service Center), Freily Medina (Hispanic Health Council), Hanna Nagy (DOT), Kafi Rouse (DOT), Kelly Alberdi (CVH), Kelly Babbitt (OAG), Keshia Francis (CVH), Leonard Bibiloni (WCMHN), Lindsay Jesshop (Dept. Veteran Affairs), Lucy Freeman (Inspirica Inc.), Mavis Chappell (CRMHC), Melodie Singleton (CMHC), Michael Sweetman (McCall Behavioral Health Network), Naomi Barrett (DCF), Noa Kantorovich (CRMHC), Shimika Drummond (Office of Early Childhood), Stephan Bobb (CVH), Supreetha Koneru (Judicial Branch), Tameka Allen (RVS), Timothy Fraylon I (CVH), Victoria Addawoo (CVH), Yudelka Pena (SWCMHS).

Tara Hall continues to support and offer programs to CRMHC, CVH, SWCMHS and SMHA. So far this year, Tara has already facilitated five programs with many more to come for the fall. She has done staff retreats, leadership programs and implicit bias trainings to name a few.

I support the other four LMHA's: CMHC, RVS, WCMHN and WFH have completed seven programs with 5 more already scheduled for the rest of the year. I have facilitated a program on intersectionality, unconscious bias, ableism, and a few lunch & learns.

Together, OMHE has offered over 100 programs this year with over 1200 attendees. Phew, we have been busy!!



The Resource Corner

Articles, Links and Videos

OFFICE OF MULTICULTURAL HEALTH EQUITY (OMHE)

[The FrameWorks Institute](#)

[The Trevor Project](#)

[How Healthy is Your ZIP Code?](#)
([youtube.com](#))

[Wealth Inequality in America](#)

The Multicultural Advisory Council (MCAC) was established in 1996 to “be the multicultural champions for DMHAS.” The Director of the DMHAS OMHE chairs the MCAC, which is comprised of people passionate about the importance of multiculturalism in a recovery oriented system of services and supports, who volunteer their time to the council. The Council meets the 1st Friday of each month. Each of the five DMHAS regions have developed Regional MCAC’s, to further the work of the Council. They provide activities that improve multiculturalism within the DMHAS system, and educate and enhance awareness of the importance of multiculturalism at the local level. Through these efforts, DMHAS will reduce healthcare disparities within its system.



We value your feedback, Help us improve the MCAC newsletter by connecting and sharing your feedback by clicking the link below!

[OMHE Newsletter Feedback Survey](#)
[\(surveymonkey.com\)](#)

“The Cultural Corner” is a publication of the DMHAS Office of Multicultural Health Equity. Any information herein, including editorial comments, opinions, news items, articles, & other information are strictly those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of DMHAS or OMHE.